№10 (34)
May 1999

The Right to Freedom

The Bulletin of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna-96"



Minsk, march and meeting in support of M.Chygir on May 24, 1999.

VICTORY OR DEFEAT?

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS ACTUALLY TOOK PLACE, BUT... THE RESULTS WERE CONSIDERED BY THE CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION INVALID

When the deputies of the 13th Supreme Soviet appointed on 16 May the presidential elections, there were quite few people who believed that the elections marathon would come to its logical ending. Some people said that everything would finish with the appointment of the date of elections still others used to say that the elections would be overwhelmed in repressions against the organisers.

Such scepticism was well-grounded as it was based on the real situation in our country. President Lukashenka plans to rule the country up to 2001 and it goes without saying he didn't want anyone to be in power before that time. From the very first days the subordinate Mass Media, mainly radio and television launched a programme aimed at discrediting the election campaign, organised by the opposition. Later, when the Central Election Commission started to form election commissions when the supporting groups started to collect signatures for registration, the authorities made use of a powerful lever of pressure intimidation against the organisers of the elections. Under its pressure there were not only the representatives of the Central Election Commission but also thousands of people all over the country («Chronicles» in the last issues of our bulletin was totally devoted to this topic, but unfortunately we couldn't give information concerning all facts of repressions). But, in spite of all obstacles, the elections were going on, in accordance with the schedule. At that time it was quite clear that complete, really legitimate elections wouldn't take place. One of the most important things was the fact that a certain part of Belarusans didn't want to put up with the current regime and was ready to struggle for its change.

The Belarusan Popular Front, the most influential and well-organised opposition party, took an active part in the elections from the very beginning. Thanks to it, election commissions were established in all districts of Belarus. The Central Election Commission understood that it was impossible to conduct elections at stationary electoral districts in the present political situation and that's why they made up their minds to organise groups of 2 people who were to visit voters' houses.

The elections started on May 6. But the leader of the BPF and the candidate for the presidency, Zyanon Paznyak called this method of voting illegal and later for this reason as well as many

(to be continued on p. 2)

CHRONICLE

On 13 May, **a sitting of the Supreme Economic Court of the Republic of Belarus took place. There were examined the suits of independent newspapers against State Committee on Press. By this action the papers disputed the legal ground of warnings issued by State Committee on Press. The representatives of newspapers applied the Court for postponing its sitting for they were not able to come. The Court did not satisfied the petitioning and launched court hearings without representatives of newspapers. During the trial the judge Boika set no expert opinion though the newspapers were charged by State Committee on Press with calls for seizure of power. Such was an appraisal given to communications about forthcoming presidential elections in independent press by State Committee on Press.**

On 16 May, **the presidential elections scheduled by the 13th Supreme Soviet have come to an end. According to Adrian Severin, head of the OSCE monitoring and advisory group in Belarus, elections were a political event which gave possibilities to make certain conclusions. Adrian Severin believes that representatives both of Belarusan authorities and opposition will make good use of this event and begin constructive and serious talks to solve the constitutional crisis. Special attention was paid by the OSCE representatives to the facts of persecutions and prosecutions by which the election campaign was accompanied. Adrian Severin claimed that «detention of one of the candidates for presidential office should be stopped immediately». Given the obstacles put by the authorities «no one expected that elections which took place on 16 May would correspond with the standards of the OSCE»,- said Adrian Severin.**

(to be continued on pp. 6-7)

It's early for Belarus to join Europe

In the Minsk City Court the case against Yawgen Skochka is still going on. Deputy chairman of the Malady Front is charged under art 183 (p.3) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (active participation in group actions, disturbing peace), which provides tree years of imprisonment. The pretext is – this year action on February 14, when the youth celebrated St.Valentine's Day and staged a traditional march «Belarus to Europe!»

Every year boys and girls give their greetings to foreign diplomats, in which they also ask to influence the behaviour of the Belarusan President. As to Skochka, under the accusatory conclusion, he is guilty of «gathering of about 200 people and organising an unauthorised march, which impeded traffic 10 times, 7 times for a minute, one time for 3 minutes, and near the American Embassy for 16 minutes.

The beginning of the trial was marred by a language problem. In response to the decision of judge Valery Kamisaraw to conduct the trial in Russian (as the majority of trial participants speaks it) the convict said that he has a good command of Belarusan and German and understands Russian. Nevertheless judge considered that it would be better to involve an interpreter from Belarusan into Russian. Going further, I'd like to point out that they resorted to the service of the linguist from the Belarusan State University only once when one of the witnesses, a militia psychologist, didn't understand a Belarusan word «khodnik» which means – «pavement»

Gary Paganyaila, who represented the Belarusan Helsinki Committee, and Barys Gyunter from the Human Rights Centre «Vyasna-96» – public defenders – took part in the trial. Syargey Lepesh was Yawgen Skochka's counsel for defence. On G.Paganyaila's proposal, the defence arose the question of the case because of absence of corpus delicti. The convict had served 11 days in administrative detention for that march. They also referred to an awkward situation with certain laws, which under the influence of changes in the society in the former Soviet Union were added democratic alterations. For instance, in the laws at the Soviet Union the definition of «group actions disturbing peace» as well as amenability were reviewed, but these changes were not included in the Belarusan Criminal Code. But this proposal was not accepted.

What is this threat like? And to whom? Let's have a look at these events through the testimony of the convict and numerous witnesses. At the end of January, they appealed twice to the Minsk City Executive Committee to authorise the march «Belarus to Europe!». The authorities allowed to hold a rally in front of the Palace of Sports and prohibited to gather on the Square of Freedom. Instead of visiting embassies by all the participants of the action the Minsk City Executive Committee proposed 2 or 3 youths to hand petitions on behalf of all the youth. In accordance with the current law, the response of the authorities had to be given to the applicants not later than 5 days before the beginning of the action. But the letter of the City Executive Committee was belated. But all the four applicants of the action were called to have a talk in the building of the City Administration. Three of them (V.Kanapatsky, A.Pyatrow and A.Yanukevich) refused to stage a rally in this way. Partially it was made because of the unwillingness to doom the youth for new arrest but at the same time they tried to intimidate the leaders of the Malady Front. For instance, on February 12 in the morning militiamen brought a subpoena to A.Yanukevich's house. As Yawgen Skochka puts it, he was intimidated with prison. But from the very beginning he said that in case any of the statements of the appeal was changed, he wouldn't bear responsibility for the consequences. The ban of the march and the fact that the meeting was authorised on Masherov Avenue, where there is loud music from the opposite cinema, Skochka called the provocation of the authorities. «I couldn't leave the youth, who traditionally gather on St.Valentine's Day on the Square of Freedom and I remember that last year even gathering on that place ended in detentions, - says Yawgen.

The court listened to the witnesses: 5 militiamen, 4 members of the Malady Front as well as 3 youths who found themselves on the scene of the action by chance and were detained by the militia. It's interesting that none of the witnesses recollected of the facts which could be classified as disturbances. The militiamen at the trial told simultaneously that either they saw nothing or the march was rather quiet. The only in vexed question was connected with impediment traffic near the USA Embassy, where indeed the traffic had been stopped for several minutes. At that very moment the participants of the action were waiting until 2 youths on their behalf handed the petition. One of the militiamen who watched the action drew the attention of the court to the fact that in the street where the youth was, the pavements were very narrow: «There wasn't anywhere to go». In general, the militiamen stressed the organisation of the march and the absence of aggressiveness among the youth.

Mikalay Vilkotta, lieutenant-colonel, deputy chairman of the City Department of Internal Affairs, was the only one who expressed his grudge against Yawgen Skochka. Mikalay Mikalaevich thinks that such an excellent organiser as Yawgen could have co-ordinated with the militia unexpected «nice fireworks» in front of the Lithuanian Embassy. «We have specialists, it's still fire» – said a worried lieutenant colonel. But Skochka affirms that fireworks were out of the blue for him as well». By the way it happened soon after Yawgen had given a subpoena in the militia – perhaps someone decided to express his protest in such a way. The militiamen believe that the reason for the subpoena was the fact that the convict didn't refuse to participate in the action. That's all.

At the present moment, when I write these lines it's unknown what verdict will be brought (the trial will continue in June). I want to hope that Yawgen Skochka will be acquitted, but taking into consideration the work of our courts, he is likely to get a suspended sentence.

Yana ZHDANOVICH

Victory or defeat?

(continued from p.1)

other violations of the law on elections he announced that he withdrew his nomination.

In spite of the fact that soon after that a part of BPF members practically avoided any participation in the elections, the election campaign went to its end. But as during the election campaign there wasn't wide and free discussion of candidates' programmes and there wasn't a campaign for each of them, as well as for obstacles made by authorities and numerous violations of the law, the results of elections were considered invalid.

Thus, a 4-month presidential campaign came to an end with the same results as it had started. What next? The Central Election Commission made a decision to organise repeated elections within the three months after these elections with the repeated nomination of candidates. But it can be carried out under the strict contract of the OSCE and other international organisations.

It's known that the elections on May 16 were considered by the majority of observers to be a political action aimed at getting to know the public opinion but not as a means of giving the country a new President. But the fact that the elections under the conditions of severe oppression took place, that the date of July 20 (the date when the presidential mandate expires) is known to everybody, that the vast majority of citizens openly and decidedly came out against the regime even under the threat of repressions, that people connect their hopes for the best with a new President – enables us to affirm, that the work of organising and carrying out the presidential elections was well-timed and not in vain.

Andrey NALIVA

YULIA CHYGIR:

«I BELIEVE THAT SOON THE AUTHORITIES WILL CHANGE...»

AN INTERVIEW OF THE JOURNALIST OF THE BULLETIN «THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM» WITH YULIA CHYGIR, WIFE, COMPANION AND COUNSEL FOR DEFENCE OF MIKHAIL CHYGIR, A CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE AND NOW A PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE.

— Yulia Stanislavawna how is the investigation into the criminal case of your husband going on?

— I can't even answer completely to this question, because I was permitted to defend my husband in court and I signed certain obligation. I don't have a right to divulge the facts of the investigation. Within the authorised limits I say that having gone into the case I astonished that a lot of documents had been falsified. Even now I am handing in applications to institute criminal proceedings against the people who are involved into the investigation as there are falsified forged documents in the case. Some of them had been fabricated rather vividly and rudely.

— How is Mikhail Mikalaevich getting on now? In what conditions is he kept? You may be know that Mr. Paznyak, the other candidate shared his ideas concerning his participation in the elections and the arrest...

— I don't know precisely what Paznyak had said and written, but I hear that he believes that everything that has happened and is happening to Chygir – is a planned KGB action... I am not going to comment on it but if Mr. Paznyak came here he is likely to find himself in the same place, in the custody centre. I believe if he asked, he would share the cell with Chygir. It's one thing. The second. I want to say, that by now my husband is kept not in the worst conditions if compared to those in which other people are. There are no murders in his cell, there are no people who have a feeling of revenge against Chygir. He is not beaten, not tortured. It's true. But the rest... Prison is prison...

— Looking back what is your attitude to the results of the presidential campaign? Do you feel sorry for all these? Some people say: there are no changes, they failed to win the regime, Chygir is in prison.

— I don't think that there is no victory. I want to say that when Mikhail Mikalaevich agreed to participate in this action, in the elections, he didn't hope that he would be President. And it's not the reason for his will and his readiness to participate in the elections campaign. He announced it because he realised that someone had to participate in the elections, appointed by the Supreme Soviet. If there hadn't been any people who were not afraid to register themselves among candidates, this action might had been over at the very beginning – in January, and there would had been no talks about the elections. The fact that within a year and half we managed to wake up the public, to attract the attention of international community to Belarus – isn't it a positive result? We had an opportunity to wake up a lot of people who were going from one house to another, agitating, explaining why the elections were due to be in that very year – isn't it the work, aren't they the result of all the campaign?

I can't agree with the people who say that there had been a split in the opposition. I don't think it is – people unite and make group around different opinions, around different ideas concerning the problem what to do, which way to take. I believe, it's again good. In different parts of the country, in villages, in district towns all people worked together, representatives of different parties collaborated. The elections woke people up to struggle against the present power because there is a hope for them to change it. Neither Chygir, nor the people who initiated this action hoped that they would do it quickly, that they would win on May 16. They had an objective: to attract the attention of the international community, to remind everybody that on July 20 Alexander Lukashenka's presidential mandate expires and to announce that the citizens of Belarus don't agree that he plans to extend it for 2 years more. If hadn't attempted, we would have been very naive to believe that the international community would have solved this problem on July 20. When you, in fact, do nothing against vivid violations of laws and the Constitution, when you don't express your indignation – why should Germans or English people or Poles remove Lukashenka from power?

The fact that Chygir is in prison now, hurts me much as anyone else. Especially when some of people believed in victory on May 16 and only for that were together with us, hardly had Mikhail Mikalaevich found himself in prison, turned away and didn't participate in the elections any more. As for as I understand they betrayed the case. Because such situations are a good checking. The fact that he is arrested makes me feel sad and frightened. But, it means that it's his fate, he has to overcome it. But I know for sure that in his life Mikhail Mukalaevich has never done anything against the Criminal Code. It doesn't matter what Lukashenka or the detectives will say, they won't find any criminal activity in it.



Yulia CHYGIR

Because there is no it, it doesn't exist. That's why I believe that my husband will be released as soon as Lukashenka is removed from power. As soon as they choose or appoint somebody else instead of him. It won't happen earlier. I'd love to believe in another way but it's hope, again hope.

I believe that soon the authorities in Belarus will change. Not only the opposition is against Lukashenka nowadays but also the inevitable processes which are going on in the economy. Mikhail Mikalaevich and me know that even if President manages to hold the power by force, the economic crises will make the people, who still trust him, join those, who don't want him to be President just now.

— The other day Lukashenka adopted a bill which prohibits price increase on 59 goods and services...

— Yes, we have already seen it. When we restrain prices on purpose, what will happen? He is not able to regulate everything, it's impossible. It means that prices on goods of first necessity will increase. And the goods of first necessity will gradually disappear from the shop shelves. These are the laws of economy, but he issues such a bill. I always say: he'd better feel sorry for women and issue a new bill – to shorten the pregnancy time from 9 to 3 months! It's all the same! Only in this case we realise that it's impossible, but economy is more abstract. Those who

(To be continued on p.p. 4-5)

«I BELIEVE THAT SOON THE AUTHORITIES WILL CHANGE...»

(Continued from p.3)

are not experts can fail understand that bills can't affect the economy laws. Economy can't be sent to prison, can't be intimidated, can't be made as you want.

— Yulia Stanislavawna, has the militia found the offenders who robbed Chygir's head quarters?

— The girl who owns the premises where we organise our meeting, didn't call the militia. She didn't do it because now we practically know who were there at the night of robbery. We know what cars were near the house, where they loaded robbed things. The people from neighbouring houses who saw what was going on told us about it. But firstly these people are afraid of giving evidence openly. Secondly we clearly realise the purpose of the robbery. In this case detectives would have a possibility to check everyone who enters this apartment, to search at any moment, to interrogate...

— It's known that when your husband was Prime Minister, there were attempts to fabricate a criminal case against him. For example, to make the arrested people give testimony that your husband and son were criminals. How would you comment on it?

— There were a lot of such cases. The first one took place two weeks after my husband started to work as Prime Minister. It happened to my younger son. The elder son is more calm, he can spend all day long with a computer, but the younger is very sociable and open. Perhaps that's why he suffered a lot.

Once my son was driving from Poland. Approaching Minsk the car suddenly turned across the road. It happened at 4 o'clock in the morning. The son realised that he wouldn't be able to do anything himself and he made a fire near his car lest someone did crash into his car. Then he walked several kilometres to the nearest station of road militia. He asked to phone his friends to come to help him and he was answered: «It's a station of road militia, but not a trunk-call office». They themselves refused to pull aside the car. The son asked what would happen if someone crashed into the car (it was foggy), they answered that if someone crashed they would come to the scene of accident. The son got angry and in response he was slapped in face and later he was beaten up and taken to the district department of Internal Affairs. While he was in the militia, his car was broken and robbed. When they started to investigate it (even Minister of Internal Affairs – at that time Agalets was involved), the militiamen wondered: «You must have said at once that you are Chygir's son». As if any other citizen, not a son of prime Minister who stands in front of them, can be offended and beaten! There were other cases when Sasha was beaten up and later asked the same question...

— Your children, have they made use of their father's high position?

— It's awkward for us. When they were small, Mikhail Mikalaevich worked in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, but they didn't have a slightest idea what it was. The children used to tell that when other people realised who was their father, it made them move away from real life. One day Sasha told me: «Mama, Mama, can I change my surname for your maiden name?» Do you feel how this celebrity complicated his life!..

The most terrible incident happened several months before his resignation. When in the first incidents it was hard to make any connections between conflicts of our children with militiamen, this time this is was vivid enough. Once my son and some of his friends drove up to the shop «Yubileyny». The people in civil from the car which followed them came up to them. The unknown people introduced themselves as militiamen and asked to show them the documents. All of them, except Sasha, were made raise their arms and put them on the hood. They started to beat Sasha up. He fell down. Hardly had they started to kick him in head, one of the friends couldn't stand it any more and rushed to those people. It turned out the next day that Sasha had concussion of brain. He was in hospital and thanks to the car number we managed to find the people who had beaten him up. All of them except for one man. The one, who was kicking him in head.

I demanded to institute criminal proceedings. Mikhail Mikalaevich presented the President with a fail accompli. Officials from intelligence department Galowking and Rabavalaw checked the fact of my son's slaughter. These are quotations from a report to the President:

«Major Barowsky I.K. (head of the group) and sergeant Shchepka A.F. (driver) affirm that among the participants of the incident there were 4 militiamen (including 1 woman) and two friends of Barowsky I.K., who were there by chance... Chygir A.M. says that all militiamen (except the driver) were drunk. Barowsky I.K. and Shchepka A.F. confirm this detail in respect to 2 people, who didn't belong to the group». «... there was an attempt to transfer the case to the prosecutor's office for re-examination but (as Elmanaw V.I. says) the head of investigation department of the prosecutor's office of the Republic of Belarus Matsel refused».

As you see, the prosecutor's office avoided further investigation of this case. It was initiated by the friends of criminals who were sitting and are sitting now next to them in the office. My son was in hospital when the Presidential security department tried to drive him somewhere. Only thanks to my interference we avoided it. The criminal case was dropped off, because detective Shpak failed to identify the man who was kicking Sasha in head!

But the fact that 4 militiamen were nearby and watched it and then got in the same car with the criminal – as if it's not accessory or concealment to a crime!

— As far as I understood it happened on the eve of the last referendum?

— It happened in June, 1996. In June there was also an incident with Ales Vechar. This man was in the opposition and criminal proceedings were instituted against him on falsified grounds. He had been forced to give testimony that he, our son, Bagdankevich's son and Alyaksandr Pupeyka were in the same criminal gang, involved in driving cars from abroad. In order to make Ales Vechar give such testimony he had been tortured



Minsk, meeting on 24 May, 1999.

while elling it. Some time before criminal proceedings were instituted against Dzmitryi Bulychaw, who also was made give false testimony against our family. They wanted him to call Sasha among his companions. He didn't give up and didn't give «the required» testimony. These people spoke out that they were forced to give false evidence. As a result they were sentenced to the term which doesn't correspond to the gravity of their offences.

I could name dozens of such cases. And besides, facts about our family and children which don't correspond to the fact were spreading regularly across the Republic. People come from Grodno region, Gomel region and simultaneously speak about one and the same gossip. Sorry, but everybody knows, you read in the press that Lukashenka's son shot at customers at the bar. They ceased talking about it very quickly, and in the remote parts they don't know about it at all. Is there more interest to our family than to the family of the President? I reckon than gossips about our family are spread by special departments, special people. They were making the image of a criminal family with enviable permanency in order to compromise my family and oppress my husband through the children.

— It means that certain categories of people were not satisfied with Mikhail Chygir even at that time when he was Prime Minister?

— Of course. Everybody believes that Lukashenka took in his team only compromised people. In fact there is some true in it. But in respect with Chygir I see it was in the following. At that moment, it seems to me, the appointment of Chygir on that post was connected with the problem of political crisis and in order to form the Government. Lukashenka had nothing that could compromise Mikhail Mikalaevich. Later on he needed a lever to control Chygir. From the very first day they had disagreements. Why were there 2 budgets? Lukashenka didn't trust Chygir, he couldn't entrust him shady payments, secret problems. I know that my husband refused to finance a very expensive repair of Presidential residency. My husband refused to give to Lukashenka money connected with the growth of his welfare on the Presidential post. They needed an obedient Chygir in order to oppress him. That's why they attempted to compromise him.

On the other side I think that it's simply Lukashenka's style of working. Perhaps it's a coincidence, but our family wasn't the only one on which they oppressed through children. I know, for instance, that Tsitsyankow's children were beaten up as well. Vinnikava's children were beaten up. It's only what I know, but who knows how many families suffered from it?

— All what you are talking is terrible.

— Yes. But I can't speak about all horrors. Everything I told is a little part of it... I hope, that sooner or later they will come to an end. Not only for me, and my family but also foe all those who finds themselves in such a situation, for the whole country.

Interviewed by
Tatsyana SNITKO.

Mail

ELECTIONS: VIEW FROM PROVINCE

As a member of the district elections commission I was advised to hold the voting on the election of President of Belarus in my village Gurnawschyna, Kletsk region on the 10[th] of May. And I did as advised. Our village is rather small and everybody knows me. So when I came to a house with the ballot-box nobody got surprised. Everybody knew about the presidential elections being held in the country. But not much was known about the programmes of the candidates for the post. Those who doubted anything crossed both names (as I learned later) but everyone, whose house I visited participated in the elections.

That evening I managed to visit 10 houses. Nineteen people voted. But I didn't have a possibility to visit all the houses in the village. Several militia men arrived from the district centre and announced that they had been informed I was performing «illegal activity». They took me to Kletsk. They also took the ballot-box and two witnesses, who live in the village.

The old woman, one of the witnesses, couldn't understand why she had been taken and all the way to Kletsk worried a lot, as she was afraid it was for «moon-shine» (alcoholic drink produced privately and illegally). And in militia station she nearly made a scandal trying to prove she wasn't involved in anything. Sympathising with her I tried to calm her down to explain everything. I told her she was there because of the presidential elections case. Her face changed at once. She rushed to a militia man with words: «Fellows, where is the ballot-box? I shall vote now...»

I was questioned in front of the camera. As it turned out they wanted to show a local dissident to KGB in Minsk. The blank voting-papers were confiscated the ballot-box was broken up and militia men made a kind of the count. There were 19 bulletins in the box. In seven of them both names had been crossed, ten my fellow-villagers voted for Paznyak and two – for Chygir.

After the questioning I was taken to the District Prosecutor's Office where Gaidish A.C., the public prosecutor and a junior counsellor of justice, wrote out an «official warring on the inadmissibility of law infringement», in which they promised to sue me in accordance with article 166 of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus. In words the public prosecutor prohibited to leave the village till the 17[th] of May threatening to imprison me otherwise. In the evening I was at home. In that way my participation in the Presidential Elections ended.

What conclusions can I draw? Even in the country side people are fed up with the situation in the country. They want changes and they are ready to vote for them. They have realised that the reality of changes depends on them.

Aleg NIKULIN

Kletsk region

«NAVINY» FACES FORTUNE OF «SVABODA?»

On May 26, the editor's office of the «Naviny» newspaper received a warning from the State Committee on Press . The grounds for that was the article «Carbuncles of Lawfulness» by one of the journalists which reflected the image of present militiaman. The truth is that the image wasn't very good or appealing, but many readers noted the humour and exact characteristics. But the State Committee on Press having analysed the article found in it «kindling» of social hostility.

It was the third official warning made to the «Naviny» since the last year's spring. In accordance with the Law «About Publishing and other Mass Media» in case of an editor's office receives more that two warnings the edition should be closed after court proceedings in 1-year term.

As it is known the «Naviny» is the successor of the famous «Svaboda» which was closed in the end of 1997. Reborn under another title several months later it is still not the authorities' favourite. Municipal services joined the authorities in their struggle with the newspaper. On May 20, just when the volume with the results of the presidential elections was being published in the editor's office electricity was suddenly turned off.

Our correspondent

Events Facts Comments

(continued from p.1)

On 16 May, Minsk voters of the Maskowski district led by Syargei Antonchyk, deputy of the 12th Supreme Soviet, who lives within this electoral district, organised a polling station. For this purpose they used an old bus. Voting process was held according to all procedures provided by the law. There was organised a cabin for secrete voting, the members of local election commission and independent observers were present. There was no electoral rolls but voting-papers were given only in case of showing a passport which proved the district's residence. Voting process was conducted from 9.30 a.m. to 19.15 p.m. Out of 2.100 people who had the right to vote 1.180 people took part in the voting process. Tens of Belarusan journalists as well as those from outside the country watched the course of elections. The representatives of the OSCE monitoring and advisory group in Belarus led by Adrian Severin also watched the election process. At 19.15 in the evening organisers of the polling station were informed about intention of police to detain the members of election commission and confiscate the voting-papers as well as electoral rolls. At 19.20 they decided to stop election process and all together came in the doorway of the nearby building. In two minutes the doorway was blocked by policemen who tried to arrest the organisers of the polling-station. Having made good use of a worked out falling back technique the organisers of elections managed to avoid «meeting» the policemen.

On 16 May, Ales Barel' and Kazimir Lokits', members of election commission, were detained at 11.10 a.m. in Grodna for conducting the presidential elections in an open place (Karl Marks street). Policemen drew up reports, confiscated ballot-box and 500 voting-papers. Valyantsin Luchko and Mikola Voran, members of the City election commission, were also detained. They watched the election process in capacity of observers. According to Uladzimir Kisialevich, member of the local branch of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96», policemen treated people with breaking the law. At 11.30 Yawgen Chygir and Zmitser Kachan were detained for conducting the elections in the city district Farty. Policemen drew up reports, confiscated ballot-box and 66 voting-papers. A search was conducted in a car belonging to Kachan, as a result 143 voting-papers were confiscated. Yuras Matsko, member of the City election commission, and Alexander Paradkaw, representative of Belarusan Helsinki Committee, who watched the election process were also detained. In the market «Pawdniovy» at 13.00 Viktar Sukhi and Mikhas Charnushchyk, members of the city district election commission, and the member of the Grodna city election commission Piotr Anisimovich were detained. Policemen drew up reports, confiscated ballot-box and 1419 voting-papers. The workers of the amalgamation «Azot» by telephone invited the representatives of election commission to come with ballot-box to the amalgamation's entrance lodge. The commission members were met at the entrance lodge by policemen who tried to arrest them. In an office of the oblast council of the BPF election process went on. The office was visited by Mr. Sitnikaw, officer on duty of the District Administration of Internal Affairs, with a group of policemen. Members of election commission were proposed a «guard» motivating it by information they received by phone about threat «to bomb it». Commission members refused such a «help».

On 16 May, Adam Yiorsh and Ales Masiuk, members of the local election commission, were detained in Slonim (Grodna region) for conducting the presidential elections in the streets of the town. Policemen drew up reports and confiscated ballot-box as well as voting-papers.

On 16 May, Mikhas Gladukhaw and Yazep Palubyatka, members of the district election commission were detained in Slonim (Grodna region) for conducting the elections. They were drawn up reports and confiscated both ballot-box and voting-papers.

On 16 May, Zelva (Grodna region), the seven policemen led by director of the district executive committee on propaganda burst into the flat belonging to Yuras Kachuk where the polling station was organised. They confiscated ballot-box and voting-papers. Policemen insisted on written explanations. Yu.Kachuk was «invited» to come to investigator for interrogations.

On 15-16 May, the Economical and Juridical Lyceum of Baranavichy held an educational seminar devoted to human rights issues in Lyakhavichy. The first day of the scheduled programme was productive one. The participants of the programme heard through the following lectures: «Principal human rights: history and the present time» and «Right to life». The morning of the next day, 16 May, began for the seminar participants as well as for the lectures and organisers from the search in the rooms of the local hotel they stayed in. Staff member of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96» Tatsiana Raviaka says: «While I was sleeping my room was entered by two men without knocking at the door. One of them was in police uniform another one – in civilian clothes.» «We must examine your personal belongings», — it was the response to my question: «Who are you?» «Is it a search?» — I asked and heard the reply: «No, we just examine it.» Policemen and unknown men in civilian clothes searched the whole room: a wardrobe, a table and my personal belongings. They found nothing and left the room. After dressing myself I went to the corridor to wonder what was going on next and saw Ales Gorbach – responsible for the seminar – being escorted by these two men. Some minutes later they were back to take my colleague Valiantsin Stefanovich. When I asked where and what for they were taking Valiantsin Stefanovich they replied: «For clarifying some things!» The next meeting with representatives of the authorities took place again in the hotel when they returned to take explanations of the reason of our staying in Lyakhavichy. An official of the Criminal Investigation Department using my words wrote the «explanation» which I refused to sign, for it was written in the Russian language whereas I was speaking Belarusan. He agreed and proposed to me to write explanation. To my question why he didn't write and speak the Belarusan language investigator answered that legal proceedings are done in the Russian language and added that he would make lots of mistakes if he wrote in the Belarusan. Police officials proposed to bring all the participants of the seminar to the bus station in police car – in fact to deport them. Such a service was refused by young people and they left «very hospitable» Lyakhavichy on their own.

On 19 May, Zmitser Kaspyarovich – a minor – addressed the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96». In his statement Z.Kaspyarovich wrote the following: «On 19 May at 00.30 in the morning my friend Paval Myagkow and me were detained near the tower of the company «Belsel». It happened after we hanged on it a white-red-white flag. Then they brought us to police car where they started us beating. With fists they beat myself upon kidneys, with their legs they kicked myself in my back. In short they beat myself black and blue. Every present policeman (at minimum about 7 persons) kicked myself at least one time. Then my friend under threat of violence was ordered to climb the tower to take down the flag. Simultaneously I was fell on the ground spreading hands and legs aside. Two policemen kicked 4-5 times in my abdomen. One of them treaded on my hand. Then we were brought to the Savetski Administration of Internal Affairs where we were kept for 9 hours without accusations. Talking to each other policemen told that there was no article to prosecute us. All our requests to phone and inform our relatives about this happening were rejected. Next day at about 9.00 in the morning a captain, who did not introduce himself, drew up a report and accused us in hooliganism. Soon after eleven o'clock I was released. But before it they rang up my mother, for I was minor. They phoned my mother just in the morning of the next day. I consider my rights were violated». Paval Myagkow was sentenced to five days of administrative detention.

On 19 May, press-conference devoted to the results of the presidential elections was held by the Central Election Commission in Minsk. An analysis of the election campaign shows that Belarusan authorities used repressions in order to break it. Two thousand three hundred people – mostly members of local election commissions, activists and volunteers of election campaign – were interviewed on the case of Viktar Ganchar, who was accused of unauthorised appropriation of official title or power, connected with committing socially dangerous deeds on this base. The results of elections were declared on the press-conference. The Central Election Commission confirmed that elections took place but its ends in the part of the voting results are considered invalid. The chairman of the Central Election Commission Viktar Ganchar called the conditions under which the elections were conducted to be «abnormal». By saying this he meant repressions to which almost everybody engaged in the process of elections was subjected. But in spite of repressions members of election commissions did impossible thing they brought the elections to the end – emphasised Viktar Ganchar.

On 20 May, examination of a case of Yawgen Scochka, deputy chairman of Malady Front, was launched in the City court of Minsk. He is being charged with participation in a youth action «Belarus to Europe!» which took place on February 14. The court hearings were postponed on June 2.

On 21 May, P.Kanavalchyk, editor-in-chief of the independent newspaper «Navinki» – newsletter of the Minsk's cultural beau moned set up by a group of anarchists in January 1998, was severely beaten by people in civilian clothes near the entrance to his house. The satiric newspaper responded to all happenings. According to Ales Mazur, responsible secretary of «Navinki» newspaper, it might be an ordinary hooligans but the possibility of intelligence services' involvement can't be also eliminated. Heavily injured P.Kanavalchyk was brought to hospital where he was performed an operation.

On 24 May, a meeting in support of the detained former prime-minister Mikhail Chygir was held in Yakub Kolas Square in Minsk. Yuliya Chygir, wife of Mikhail Chygir, informed people that the 24 of May is birthday of her husband. In this very day Mikhail Chygir was informed that his term of detention would be prolonged by two months.

On 26 May, State Committee on Press issued next in turn warning to the independent newspaper «Naviny», which is the second during the year. First one was issued for publication an information about presidential election scheduled on May 16. The second one – for the article «Carbuncles of Lawfulness» by Alexander Dubravin. According to State Committee on Press A.Dubravin stirs up social hostility and humiliates police officials.

On 27 May, Alexander Nabeshka, resident of Baranavichy and liquidator of the consequences done to the Republic by Chernobyl catastrophe, lodged a complaint addressed to the chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus. By this complaint he is charging Alexander Lukashenka with breaking some articles of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus. Particularly, by presidential decree No 21 Alexander Lukashenka repealed the article No 19 «About the resignation on preferential terms for liquidators of the consequences of Chernobyl catastrophe». A.Nabeshka wants the Constitutional Court to give the legal appraisal to the President's activities as well as to recover a compensation from him at the rate of 50 milliard roubles. This money should be used for creation in Baranavichy an association of the liquidators of the Chernobyl catastrophe' consequences.

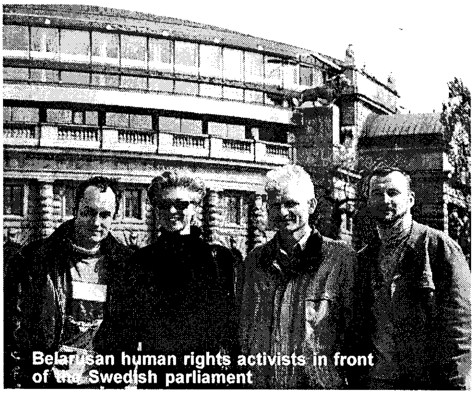
On 28 May, trial under Vasil Staravoitaw, former chairman of the agricultural joint stock venture «Rassvet» and the twice Hero of Socialist's labour, has come to an end. V.Staravoitaw since November 1997 has been kept in an isolation ward and accused of a number of economic crimes. Since November 1998 the trial has been going on. The court's verdict is as follows: two years of a strict colony regime with property confiscation. Alyaksei Yawstrataw, head of the transport shop, and Aleg Shapavalaw, head of the fish farm of «Rassvet» who were charged together with Vasil Staravoitaw were sentenced to five years of imprisonment. When the court's verdict come in force V.Staravoitaw will spend five more months in jail.

«VIASNA-96» ESTABLISHES CO-OPERATION

The whole weak, from 24 to 31 May, four representatives of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96» spent in Sweden, particularly in its capital city, in Stockholm. They were in Sweden on invitation of the Svenska Freds. «Viasna-96» has good partner and friendly relations with Svenska Freds.

Svenska Freds is the eldest and the biggest one in Scandinavia association struggling for peace. It was set up in 1883 by the Nobel prize-winner K.P.Arnoldsson. One of particular projects Svenska Freds has been working on now is getting in touch with public organisations from Eastern part of Europe, particularly from Belarus and Russia, aimed at joint work for the benefit of democracy and co-operation with countries from Western Europe. Co-operation between «Viasna-96» and Svenska Freds goes in this direction.

Last autumn Swedish friends paid visit to Belarus. This spring they invited Belarusan partners to Sweden to get acquainted with this country, with work of Svenska Freds as well as other public organisations and to think over the plans of future co-operation. The co-ordinator of the «eastern» project Linda Issaksson and Svenska Freds's General secretary Jens Petersson proposed to conduct in Belarus this autumn joint educational seminar with participation of regional representatives of Svenska Freds as well as representatives of regional branches of «Viasna-96» to have closer contacts not only with



Belarusan human rights activists in front of the Swedish parliament

the central office of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96» but also with its local branches. Every day was full of interesting meetings, new contacts and acquaintances. But it should be emphasised that the core event was a one-day seminar devoted to political situation in Belarus. Different aspects of relationships between Sweden and Belarus both on official level and on level of public organisations were discussed on this seminar. General information about modern Belarus was presented by journalist Albin Abrahamsson. Stephan Eryksson, representative of the Swedish Ministry of International Affairs, informed the participants of the seminar about the state of official relations between the two countries. Robert Haroh, representative of Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, presented an analysis of differences in Swedish and Belarusan legal systems. Ose Foshaug made a report about the plans of future co-opera-tion between Swedish and Belarusan public organisations.

Belarusan side was presented by Lada Bukharyna (the Assembly of Belarusan Pro-Democratic NGOs) and Ales Byalatski (chairman of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96»). The appearance of Ales Byalatski provoked an interest and he was asked lots of questions covering not only human rights violations but also other aspects of life in Belarus.

For one week in Stockholm Belarusan human rights activists met a lot of interesting people and organisations. They visited Swedish parliament, where they have a meeting with Tone Tingsgort, representative of the Social-Democratic Party who many times was in Belarus and is very interested in our country. Representatives of «Viasna-96» got know more about Swedish branch of the Amnesty International, where they have a meeting with Britta Grundzin.

A lot of new things Belarusans got know from Eva Schelstrom, editor-in-chief of the magazine Pax which is published by Svenska Freds. On pages of Pax one can find not only information about Belarus but also pictures of acquaintances. One of the issues contained information about autumn visit paid by Swedish fighters for peace to Belarus and their meeting with Belarusan human rights activists from the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96» in Minsk.

The visiting of the Stockholm's investigation ward «Kronobergshekted» was also in schedule of representatives of «Viasna-96». Deputy chairman of this establishment Mats Landbring told a lot and showed how an ordinary jailed man in Sweden lives in prison. Belarusan human rights activists were deeply impressed by what they had seen in Swedish prison particularly by difference between conditions of imprisoned man in Sweden and jailed one in Belarus.

Of course Belarusans couldn't be indifferent to seesights and beauty of Stockholm – very old city with original architecture and culture. Free time they spent by going into the history as well as customs and traditions of Swedish people.

ALYAKSEI SHYDLOWSKI

EIGHTEEN MONTHS IN HELL

The new investigator started our meeting with the words: «I've been investigating murders, assaults all my life... And your case...»

Having informed him about my hunger strike I refused to give evidence till I was released with the written undertaking not to live the country. And the question seemed to be resolved when suddenly the telephone rang and after that telephone call from Minsk the investigator had nothing to do but to send me and Vadzim back to Zhodina. But before that procedure I managed to talk once more with Skarulis, the barrister, and told him that I had been beaten up in the Zhodina custody centre. He lodged a complaint to the prosecutor whose duty was to supervise prisons and jails. He also provided this information to the press. It was of great help to me. So I drew a conclusion: don't be afraid to make complaints! It won't make things worse!

In Zhodina I immediately declared that my hunger-strike was not over and handed over a written declaration of it. This time the officer's words that the BPF members were being transported produced the opposite effect. Nobody was beaten up! According to an experienced convict's words it hadn't happened for more than a year and was very unusual.

It was the result of the information about my being beaten up which had been published.

Nevertheless when we were «distributed» to our cells I realised something was wrong: they seemed to have forgotten about me. Only about 10 a.m. on the 26th of September a ward arrived and announced that hunger-strike was a grave infringement of the regime and I had to stop it. Otherwise I would be transferred to a solitary cell.

In spite of the bad state of my health I refused to give up hunger-strike. They convoyed me to the solitary cell and said: «You still have time to think it over...»

What is a solitary cell like? It's a very narrow small cell for one person with a loo in front of the ward's peephole and a small bedside table used for having meals. There is also a folding plank-bed which can be used from 10 p.m. The rest of the day it is fastened to the wall. When in solitary cell a convict has the right to sit only three times: to have breakfast, dinner and supper. I couldn't exercise that right because of my hunger-strike. That is why I cannot tell you anything about the food either: they didn't bring me meals. The convict has to spend his «free time» rubbing the walls with a duster.

A day later I had enough of this cell. Having spent the night in the solitary cell (the temperature there, by the way, was only a little higher than outdoors as the window was open all the time). I couldn't stand straight in the morning and fainted. And the again – reanimation, injections and the hospital cell.

After the second hunger-strike the stomach refuses to accept and food and for two days I was as sick as a dog. Only due to the glucose injections I could maintain my state. So, half lying in bed I was kept there till the 14th of October and then I was discharged and to the general cell. But even this discharge couldn't do without trouble. In the morning I was called to the hospital head's office and after examining me he wrote out a paper saying there was no beating. But more than a month had passed since my being beating up! Then the prosecutor, to whom my lawyer wrote, called me and questioned in detail about it. He also added that it would be hardly possible to prove the case but we would fray their nerves. The end of the «investigation» was very trivial. The officer who had ordered to beat me up was given a reprimand and another officer from the custody centre called me several times and promised to put me into a good cell only to prevent me from «setting up a clamour».

In such a way I found myself in cell No 5. And again a surprise. I was put into the cell with... foreigners. Two Russians, a Ukrainian, a Vietnamese and two Baltic people – that was the «contingent». Its peculiarity was the fact that nobody except me was receiving «parcels» and the eight kilograms I got from my parents were being done away with immediately during a couple of hours. Though had been on hunger-strike for almost 10 days I realised what is real hunger only at that time.

Hunger is when you look at the brown wall and it seems to you it is a slice of bread. Hunger is when you start thinking about breakfast just after supper and immediately get angry with someone who has left crumbs of tread on the table. Hunger is when you dream that starting from the next day you'll be given a doubled meal. Hunger is when in the night you dream of a school teacher saying to the children it is time to the canteen and awake immediately of the sound of the guard bringing the meal. But bit by bit you get accustomed. And it is because your stomach gets smaller and after you are released you cannot eat the same amount of food as you used to. In the beginning of my imprisonment I often dreamed how I would come back home and would sit at the table for a very long time eating. When I was released I felt I didn't have a desire to eat anything. Not a slightest one!

It was fun to be in one cell with foreigners. I helped them write complaints and mocked speaking the Belarusan language. I felt the taste of the guards' boots in the evenings in the corridor with them and dreamed that the little window in the door of our cell would open and the ward would say: «Shidlowski! With personal belongings!» But that window wouldn't open. In the end of October Tatiana Stankevich, the new lawyer came. And if our talk lasted only five minutes half an hour was spent by the wards to search before it and after not to let me bring or take anything. For that purpose they took my clothes off and search every piece of it.

On October 28 (it was the third month of my being in custody) the investigator allowed a meeting with my mother for the first time. And at last after long concrete corridors the ward lets me stretch my arms and look up. Mother! My dear mother! I haven't seen you only for two months but it seems – for ages! Thoughts are running and mingling in my mind but I cannot say a word: because of the psychological stress the words stuck in my throat. Only don't cry: I say to myself. Hold on! You are a man. Mother tells me about our house, about father, brother but makes me even more sad and lonely. Seeing it she starts telling me about quite a different things, piquets, collecting of signatures in my defence. And immediately I feel a kind of self-respect and strengths to struggle.

Support is needed by everyone who is a «political» prisoner. It is very important to know that not only relatives remember you but also your companions, that actions in your support are held... But the one hour meant for my meeting with mother is over. I recollect all the important things I wanted to tell her only on my way back to the cell. It is always like that...

(To be continued)

(Continuation. Beginning in №№ 31-33)

The Right to Freedom. The Bulletin of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna-96". Address: 220007, Minsk, p/b 88. E-mal:rights@v96.open.by Published twice a month in Belarusan, English and Russian languages. Circulation 299 copies. Editor-in-Chief Ales BYALATSKY.

In this number pictures by A.Karpovich and photos from the Centre "Viasna-96" archives are used.